

From The Jasper County Archives

by The Jasper County Historical Commission

At the age of 78, Dave Lee was still as active as a spring chicken. Stroking his white handlebar mustache, he agreed to relate his story of East Texas, which spanned nearly four score years, all the while maintaining that he didn't remember anything.

But, when he said that, he didn't know that he had made for himself the reputation of having one of the best memories in the Piney Woods area. His service as postmaster and notary in the Bleakwood area had left him with the ability to remember names, even witnesses to deeds and other papers he officially drew up. He knew all the old landmarks, the land divisions, and the streams of this section.

Dave Lee, a member of one of the first families to come to East Texas, was perhaps kin to almost everyone in this area. Born in 1859 in Jackson Parish, Louisiana, he was only six weeks old when his parents, Jesse and Jane Sanders Lee, decided to move to Texas. The family settled in the Magnolia Springs area, but left in 1867 to settle in Newton County.

The family home in Newton County stood where the Kirbyville and Orange-Newton roads meet at Thickety Creek. Jesse owned a farm, a general store, a sawmill, a

grist mill, and a cotton gin, as well as a syrup mill. Besides all this, he was postmaster. Now, it appears that history made several pioneers who could accomplish the impossible, but Jesse Lee wasn't one of them, and he could not "run" all these things by himself, so he had his sons Dave, B.J., M. J. and T.W., to help him.

Together, they practically owned Bleakwood, especially the business end of it. This was years before Kirbyville was established.

Dave acted as postmaster for two years and as assistant for about 10 years. He recalled the era when the mail was carried by horseback from Orange, the nearest railroad, to Jasper and on to Burkeville with Bleakwood being one of the stopping points. This was in the year 1881.

Uncle Dave remembered the one and only time a mail carrier was stopped by a bandit.

"The mail was being carried that day by an extra carrier, and when he was in the Big Cypress Swamp, he was stopped and the mail pouches taken from him. My father had a little money in the pouch, and a relative, who was going to be married, had some money in an envelope."

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Jesse and a brother had to later go to Kirbyville when the bandit was arrested.

At that time, the Lees owned the only cotton and grist mill for miles around.

Later, J. R. Lee, a cousin of Dave's, built Lee's Mill at Bon Wier. These mills operated by water power.

On 31 October 1882, Dave married Carol Irving, daughter of Major J. S. Irving, an officer in the Civil War. This marriage lasted for over 54 years, and together, they reared 10 children.

In 1895, Dave, along with his family, moved to Kirbyville and built their home where the Methodist church now stands.

Kirbyville at that time was a rough-and-tumble timber camp where several shootings occurred.

The buggies and wagons, coming in for supplies, would bog up hub-deep in Main Street during bad weather.